

ELIMINATE GOSSIP IN YOUR VETERINARY PRACTICE



HOW GOSSIP CAN DESTROY THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A TEAM

When gossip happens in a practice it gets in our way and we aren't able to do our best work. Instead, we find ourselves getting pulled into problems and dealing with challenges we didn't want or ask for.

Gossip in your practice can:



Divide People Into Groups as They Take Sides

When someone gossips, the recipient may wonder, "if this is how they're talking about others, I wonder what they say when I'm not in the room." Gossip can also cause team members to feel like they have to "choose a side."



Deprive People of Feedback and Improvement Opportunities

Gossip can cost people the chance to get better at what they do. If we are complaining about things to others, we aren't supporting that team member and providing needed feedback.



Build Unhealthy Habits Around "Venting" as a Solution

It can be easy to assume venting is okay, that it's a helpful thing to do. In reality, venting creates an environment in which individuals are pulled into drama and conflict.



Reduce Communication that Helps us Do Our Jobs Well

When we have gossip in our practice it gets in the way of communication that helps the entire team perform better, provide better care, and better client focus.



Take Focus Away From Pets and Clients

If an employee is thinking about gossip she heard about another team member, she's not thinking about the client or the pet. Gossip interferes with our ability to think about what we need to do to provide the best service and care possible.

HOW TO STOP GOSSIP IN YOUR PRACTICE

1

Make Choices Together About How Much Gossip We Want on Our Team

Simply asking, “When we think about the kind of team we want to be part of, how much gossip do we want?” is a way to make choices together that help us move toward a better future. The answer seems simple, we probably don’t want a lot of gossip on our team, but this lays the foundation for what we start doing differently to actually create the team we want, together.

2

Define Gossip as a Group

Gossip doesn’t have to be negative. What if we let someone know that we have observed a team member doing something well? While we’re still talking about someone, now we’re doing it in a positive way. So, gossip can be defined as sharing information about a person that we’re not sharing with that person, often in a way that doesn’t help us get better.

3

Create a Plan for Helping Each Other as We Move Toward Our Goal

We need to create a plan to get to the place we want to be as a practice and as a team. When thinking about our plan, we want to consider behaviors and words. Questions you might ask in a meeting could be something like, “What do we need to do when someone comes to us and gossips?” or, “Do you think that person knows how you feel about their actions and do you think it might help if you shared them?”

4

Discuss, Support, and Practice

Our brains build habits through repetition. If we want to manage gossip in our practice it is important to talk about and practice how we respond, and the decisions we make when it happens. Talking about how we handle gossip in a staff meeting is a great step, but unless we discuss and practice it often and consistently we won’t build good habits.

WHAT WILL NOT WORK

1 Telling People to Stop

If we just say, “Hey, let’s just stop the gossip,” won’t that put an end to gossip? After all, we are in a position of authority. But just telling people to stop gossiping doesn’t work. Any more than telling people to show up with a better attitude or have a better work ethic works. Humans don’t really improve because of more instructions until they go through the process of defining what success for them really means first.

2 Punishing People for Gossiping

As we begin to build habits around how we handle gossip, punishment can be an enemy. When employees see that they will be punished for a certain behavior, they naturally will focus on just not getting caught. In this instance, punishment is not likely to build good habits that help us become consistently better. Instead, it simply changes the awareness of employees about when and where they can “get away with” gossip.

3 Engaging in Gossip Ourselves

It’s easy to fall into the trap of gossiping. As leaders, we often think part of our responsibility is to listen to concerns employees have, and if we allow someone to come to us to blow off steam, we may feel like we helped that employee by listening. What we’ve actually done, though, is become part of the gossip cycle. Instead of only allowing a person to vent, we can make progress and encourage engagement by asking good questions after they vent, like, “Are we just gossiping here, or is this something you would like to solve or change?” We can help our team take a what may start as gossip and turn it into a process for improvement.

The future of your practice is always connected to the way your team communicates, solves challenges and supports each other as they improve together. Eliminating gossip in your practice can be a significant step toward building that better future.

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